

overnight," because Medicare is already proposed to go broke by 2015 to 2017.

I think that is the problem we run into when we try and build upon a foundation that is already crumbling. The Medicare Program is destined to go bankrupt. We are talking about adding a whole new entitlement. Instead of trying to figure out how to plow some of these savings back into Medicare and make it sustainable, we are actually adding to and building upon a foundation that is already crumbling.

Mr. ALEXANDER. We have about a minute and a half left in our time. I wonder if Senator BROWNBACK would conclude.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I think to put it in Kansas-type terms, if you are talking about taking savings from Medicare to start a whole new health care entitlement program, that is like writing a big fat check on a completely overdrawn bank account to buy a new car.

You are going: Now, well, who would do something like that? When you are saying: Well, that is what the Federal Government is looking at doing in this proposal that Senator BAUCUS has put forward.

Medicare is not sustainable. It is not fiscally sound. You are going to write an overdraft check on that to start a whole new program that you do not have the wherewithal to do, that most Americans do not want to see you do because they want to see you fix the current program and get it on a sustainable basis.

It does not make sense. It is out of the stream of thought of the American public. We ought to back up, stop, and go at this in incremental changes, to get costs down and more people covered, that do not drive costs up, that do not do a big federal takeover of the system.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank Senators THUNE and BROWNBACK.

Obviously, we believe that instead of a 1,000-page bill, we should do what Senator BROWNBACK said. We should go step by step to re-earn the trust of the American people. For example, permitting small business plans to pool their resources to offer more insurance to a million people; buying insurance across State lines; stopping runaway junk lawsuits against doctors; signing up those people already eligible for Medicaid and SCHIP; and encouraging technology.

All of those are steps we can agree on and reduce costs, without running trillions of dollars of new debt, more taxes, and Medicare cuts. I thank the Senators from South Dakota and Kansas for participating in our colloquy.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). The Republican leader is recognized.

HEALTH CARE WEEK X, DAY III

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, over the past several months, the American people have made their voices heard in the debate over health care. Everyone is frustrated at the high cost of even routine services and procedures. But the good news is this: everyone agrees that these are real and pressing issues and that Congress can and should do something to help.

Unfortunately, the Democrat plan being contemplated here in Congress is not content simply to address the problems at hand. Instead, this plan uses these problems as an excuse to dismantle the current health care system, slap together a new one as quickly as possible, and force it on the American people whether they like it or not.

That is what is going on this week in the hearing room of the Finance Committee.

The U.S. Congress is hashing out the details of an enormously complicated bill that calls for a massive expansion of Washington's role in the health decisions of every single American. And when they are done, they plan to rush this so-called reform through Congress and force it on a country that is overwhelmingly opposed to it.

But there is really only one thing Americans need to know about this legislation: When all the talking is through, what is left is this: a trillion dollar experiment that cuts Medicare, raises taxes, and threatens the health care options that millions of Americans enjoy.

The administration has been telling Americans for months and months that if they like the coverage they have, they can keep it. Whoever believes this apparently is not familiar with the bill that Democrats in Congress want the President to sign. If they were, they would realize that it creates a new government standard for coverage, and that anyone who falls below that standard will be forced to buy a different health plan.

Government would tell you which plans you can have and which ones you can not, and if you do not like the plan they suggest, then you will have to send a check to Washington. You will get taxed. That is government expansion. Americans do not want it.

Americans are worried about spending. It seems like every time they turn around they are hearing about another trillion-dollar spending bill coming out of Washington. Well here is another. Once again, it is being rushed through Congress, and once again, we will not have enough time to read it. They made sure of that yesterday. My Republican colleague from Kentucky, Senator BUNNING, offered an amendment to give senators the time they need to study the details. Democrats struck it down.

Taxes are already high enough. They are about to get higher. This legislation will lead to significantly higher taxes on just about everybody in America. If you have health insurance, you

are taxed. If you do not have health insurance, you are taxed. If you need prescription medicine, you are taxed. If you need a medical device, you are taxed.

All these taxes would be bad enough if they were not so hard to understand.

For months we have been hearing that the goal of reform is to lower costs. Yet any school kid in America can tell you that raising taxes on something raises its cost. And every nonpartisan, independent study we have seen confirms this basic economic principle. Despite all the talk of lowering costs, all these higher taxes mean that, as a result of this legislation, health care costs are headed in one direction, and that is up.

What is worse, the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Congressional Budget Office say that some of the worst taxes would fall squarely on the backs of consumers: not on the rich, but on ordinary Americans who are already struggling through a recession.

Seniors take a serious hit from this legislation, either through cuts in services that millions of them currently enjoy, or by being forced off the plans they have. All told, this bill calls for nearly \$140 billion in cuts to Medicare Advantage; nearly \$120 billion in Medicare cuts for hospitals that care for seniors; more than \$40 billion in cuts to home health agencies; and nearly \$8 billion in cuts to hospice care.

Everyone agrees Medicare needs reform. This is not reform. This is a massive raid on a program millions of seniors depend on in order to cover the cost of another new government program. This bill uses Medicare as a piggy bank to pay for this experiment.

There is no question that Americans want health care reform. They want lower costs. They want greater access. They want commonsense reforms, like a plan to get rid of junk lawsuits on doctors and hospitals and to level the playing field when it comes to taxes on health plans. But what they are getting from Congress instead is a trillion-dollar experiment that cuts Medicare, raises taxes, and threatens the health care options that millions of Americans now enjoy. And here is the worst part: they are being told that all this has to be rushed through Congress on some artificial timeline.

Americans have been asking us to slow down. Congress is doing the opposite.

This is not how Americans expect us to do their business. We need nonpartisan groups like the Congressional Budget Office to tell us how much this legislation will cost and how we would pay for it, and we need to slow down and get it right. We need to give Members of Congress the time they need to understand what they are going to be voting on. And we need to give the American people the time they need to understand this legislation too. This bill is too big, too costly, and too important to allow anything less.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. GILLIBRAND). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the time for the cloture vote, now set for 10:30 a.m., be extended until 11 o'clock this morning.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for the knowledge of all Members, we are very close to being able to work out an agreement on the finalizing of the Interior appropriations bill. There are some language problems the staff is working on now. But we should have a series of amendments—it could be as many as seven, eight amendments—and we will try to do those in a block of time. We have 23 members who are trying to work out something in the Finance Committee as it relates to health care, so we would like to have those votes in a block of time sometime this afternoon. But we should be able to have a consent agreement that will be approved by Senator MCCONNELL and me in the near future.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, the time between now and 11 o'clock, I ask unanimous consent that be time for morning business, with Senators allowed to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOND. Madam President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Yes, we are.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN STRATEGY

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I rise today to call for the testimony before Congress of our top military commanders in Afghanistan, GEN Stanley McChrystal and General Petraeus. Congress and the American people need to hear directly and as soon as possible from the generals to ensure that political motivations in Washington do not override the vital needs of our commanders and our troops on the ground.

Ordinarily, I don't like the idea of calling generals away from their duties in theater but, unfortunately, in the often surreal world of Washington politics, all the hard work by our military and intelligence professionals on the battlefield in Afghanistan can be undone very quickly. Unfortunately, the latest verbal wavering by the administration and some of my colleagues in Congress can do just that.

Last November, when I sent my report, the Roadmap to Success in South Asia, to then President-elect Obama and his national security team, I outlined the importance of messaging to our overall success in Afghanistan and Pakistan. For too long, the United States has flailed about with an uncoordinated communication plan. In other words, we have been off message.

Unfortunately, the enemy has continued to hone its own message. Radical Islamic terrorists have staged suicide attacks for maximum publicity, propagandizing their message on the Internet, and convinced their fellow terrorists-at-arms that they will defeat the international community.

Negative and indecisive comments by the President, broadcast worldwide, have now given the enemy a big win in the public information battle.

On CNN, the President questioned: "Are we pursuing the right strategy?"

On NBC's "Meet the Press," the President's words were even more disturbing, signaling a lack of confidence in his earlier strategy. The President said:

If an expanded counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan contributes to the goal of defeating al-Qaida, then we will move forward. But, if it doesn't, then I'm not interested in just being in Afghanistan for the sake of being in Afghanistan or saving face or . . . sending a message that America is here for the duration.

Comments such as these call into doubt America's commitment to Afghanistan. They give hope to the terrorists—hope that America's resolve is not real, and that they only need to wait us out to win the war.

The people of Afghanistan get the message that we are leaving soon. The implied message is that you better work with the Taliban and al-Qaida, because they will be here after America leaves. This is a public bonanza in diplomacy for our terrorist enemies.

At the same time, these comments have done a great disservice to our men and women serving in harm's way. These heroes need our country's un-

wavering support, not vacillation because of political pressures.

President Obama's recent comments present a stark and dangerous contrast to his earlier resolve—resolve that I applauded on this floor and publicly and proudly supported. When President Obama commissioned General McChrystal's assessment of the situation in Afghanistan, I believed that he was genuinely interested in receiving the general's expert, on-the-ground perspective and his informed opinion of what strategic and tactical changes would be required for success.

Unfortunately, it now appears that the President has developed a sudden case of buyer's remorse. It seems increasingly clear to me the Obama administration is inclined to reject the counterinsurgency strategy recently recommended by General McChrystal and endorsed by the head of the U.S. Central Command, GEN David Petraeus and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen. In a bewildering twist, this is the same counterinsurgency strategy the President himself endorsed this past March.

I have been a strong and vocal supporter of the administration's new strategy in Afghanistan, so I was particularly disappointed by the President's suggestion this past Sunday that he is reconsidering the American commitment to the war in Afghanistan.

I am also deeply disturbed by press reports that Defense Secretary Gates will delay sending General McChrystal's troop request to the White House because the White House is not ready to receive it. Given the President's resolve this spring, I am somewhat puzzled by the strange treatment of General McChrystal's assessment and troop request. Unnecessary delay is not our friend in this war.

The clearest reason for this delay seems to be that the President is considering not granting General McChrystal's request. Instead, we are now hearing that he may push for a more aggressive covert war against al-Qaida leadership in Pakistan.

We all want to eliminate the al-Qaida leadership that plotted and planned the attacks that claimed more than 3,000 American lives on September 11. And depending on the details, more aggressive action in Pakistan may be a good thing. But such action should be in addition to, not a substitute for, giving our troops in Afghanistan all the resources and supporting personnel they need to succeed.

While denying al-Qaida and Taliban militants sanctuary in the border regions of Pakistan is critical, a counterterrorism-only approach, focusing on one part of this regional conflict, will ultimately hand victory to the world's most violent and feared terrorists. This type of counterterrorism-only approach failed us in Iraq and it has failed us in Afghanistan for the last 7 years.